

Cross-System Collaboration: Tools That Work *

Structural Elements

- **Blending Funding Streams:** Effective allocation of fiscal resources is a critical management function. When resources are pooled and mutually administered, the fundamental structure of the collaborative relationship is redefined.
- **Equity of Investment:** “Everyone must bring something to the table.” This can be dollars or staff time or expertise or effort or the willingness to share risk. A willingness to commit important resources is more than a state of mind.
- **Strong mandates from top administrators:** This should include highly visible modeling from top administrators.
- **Boundaries:** Limits need to be clarified and tested in order for real trust to grow. Successful collaboration focuses on close relationships, new intimacy, and new relationships. Closeness, in turn, involves risk.
- **Clear Goals:** Service integration efforts must be guided by results-driven models that specify clear accomplishments.
- **Concrete Tasks:** “Mutual, effortful action creates connection.”
- **Peer Networking:** Structure opportunities for members to meet with others that are working on similar projects in other jurisdictions.
- **Data and Outcomes:** Objective data helps to unify a diverse membership and provide an objective basis for measuring success and for focusing collaborative effort.
- **Executive Control Function:** One person or agency needs to assume leadership in terms of managing the structure and organization. The critical issue is not power and control; the critical issue is skill and resources.
- **Increased Inclusion:** The overall momentum of each collaborative should be toward expanding the range of membership in the partnership.

Leadership Elements

- **Take Care of Business:** Failure to attend to basic organizational details will quickly breed frustration. Effective and strategic management of such details communicates an image of the collaborative’s significance and organizational integrity.
- **Formal Management Tools:** The level of managerial sophistication should be geared to the complexity of the project.
- **Vision:** There should be a vision statement about the project and the process of collaboration itself that is clear, inspirational, credible, authentic, and realistically supported.

- **Impasses and Breakthroughs:** Attention to timing allows good leaders to know when work is moving along and they can recede into the background and let empowerment occur; when a stronger role is necessary to move beyond points of impasse; and when to celebrate breakthroughs.
- **Process Feedback:** Help the collaborative group reflect on its own process.
- **Breaking Barriers:** The ability to address and resolve critical barriers that block a project's success or a collaborative group's course of action is a key leadership skill.
- **Challenge and Demand:** The authoritative exercise of leadership is not directed toward making people do what the leader wants. It is directed toward the critical anxieties and hostilities that inevitably arise in collaborative work. The purpose is to free participants to engage in real dialogue and to energize them to do real work.

Interpersonal Elements

- **Personalities Matter:** Some people partner better than others, as do some organizations. For both, the important qualities include: flexibility, openness, patience, interpersonal sensitivity, communication skills, courage, the ability to take risks, the willingness to extend trust, and the willingness to do things in a new way.
- **Organizational Respect:** A climate of mutual respect demands that each member of the collaboration devote time to understanding the norms and values of their partners' organizational culture.
- **Organizational Nurture:** Nurture needs to work organizationally as well as individually. Good partners work hard to empathically understand each other.
- **Organizational Disclosure:** Direct, open communication develops trust and connection. Staff issues and financial operations provide critical venues for organizational self-disclosure.
- **Organizational Trust:** Trust in one another's ability to consistently follow through on tasks is critical. Organizational representatives must possess the information and latitude to act as an empowered custodian of their organization's resources and its capacity for risk.
- **Strength-Based Approach:** The courage to honestly analyze our own work without projection or blame. Organizations whose overall culture is negative and distrustful of clients and their own staff will not be successful in a strength-based approach nor in a collaborative effort.
- **Extending the Organization:** Good partners respect appropriate boundaries, but they also extend themselves to support their partners. Important to collaboration is the ability to make the extra effort to assure a high-quality result without resentment or grandiosity.
- **Organizational Investment:** The allocation of our time signals allocation of value.

** Adapted from Cross-System Collaboration: Tools That Work, by James L. Hoel, published by the Child Welfare League of America.*